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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not a 'Spy School'

It is not surprising that an Arab diplomat in New York would repeat to Post correspondent Michael Berlin the old canard about MECAS, the British Middle East Center for Arabic Studies at Shemlan (closed for some years because of the fighting), being a "spy school." It is surprising, however, that Mr. Berlin would take it seriously.

The British have long run a school for the training of diplomats in Arabic. Originally it was in Jerusalem, and Abba Eban was one of its early instructors. It moved to Lebanon after 1948 and the end of the British Mandate. The Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State also runs an Arabic school. It used to be in Beirut and is now in Tunis. The French also maintained one in Lebanon in the good old days.

Both the British and American schools, and I assume the French as well, permit officials of agencies other

than their foreign affairs departments to attend. MECAS was unusual in enrolling businessmen and foreigners in exchange for tuition. (As usual, the British are better businessmen than we.)

Inevitably, there have been personnel of intelligence agencies who have passed through these schools, just as they pass through language programs at a wide variety of schools and colleges in this country. To label them therefore as schools for spies is to make the sort of great rhetorical leap backwards, which is common in Lebanon but which we would hope U.N. officials and representatives would be above. That they are not is one reason that organization is so troubled.

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